

1. A method for describing the content of a data frame present on a communications network having a predetermined physical layer protocol, the method comprising the following steps:

- providing a protocol definition file, the protocol definition file including: a first definition construct that defines the format of a data frame that is structured in accordance with the requirements of the predetermined physical layer protocol, and a second definition construct that defines a plurality of message protocol types;
- storing the protocol definition file within a protocol database;
- capturing a data frame present on the communications network;
- identifying at least one protocol type of at least one message contained within the data frame from the plurality of message protocol types defined by the second definition construct; and
- providing a description of the content of the captured data frame based upon the definitions of the first and the second definition constructs.